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## BIFURCATIONS, DISCONTINUITIES, AND THE 'RUSSIAN TRACE' IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE UKRAINIAN NATION\*

**Yakov Lazarev**

Ural Federal University,  
Yekaterinburg, Russia

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The review analyses one of the most recent works by Serhii Plokhii, a renowned Ukrainian historian. In *The Cossack Myth*, Plokhii provides a complex analysis of the political and intellectual mechanisms involved in the construction of the Ukrainian nation, which served as a major impetus for the destruction of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the Soviet Union in 1991. Plokhii speculates that the source of the ideas that stimulated these processes was an anonymous essay from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century entitled *The History of the Rus*. According to the author, this work appeared exclusively as a result of how the repressive policies of the Russian government impeded the rights of the Ukrainian Cossacks and the local gentry. The ideas underlying this literary composition seemingly fuelled sentiments of opposition among Ukrainian intellectuals in the pre-revolutionary and Soviet periods, and became the basis for the modern ideology of the Ukrainian nation. However, in his search for opposition among Ukrainian elites, the author seems to overlook many bifurcations, discontinuities, and the 'Russian trace' that all took part in the process of Ukrainian nation-building.

**Keywords:** S. N. Plokhii; History of Ukraine; History of the Rus; Ukrainian nation; Ukrainian nobility; N. G. Repnin; Nation-building.

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В рецензии дан анализ одной из последних работ Сергея Плохия, известного украинского историка. В «Казацком мифе» Плохий постарался провести комплексный анализ политических и интеллектуальных механизмов строительства украинской нации, послуживших главным толчком к уничтожению Российской империи в 1917 г. и Советского Союза в 1991 г. Плохий доказывает, что интеллектуальным источником, стимулировавшим эти процессы, стало анонимное сочинение начала XIX в. «История русов». По мысли автора, данное сочинение появилось исключительно в результате репрессивной политики российского правительства, направленной против прав украинского казачества и местного дворянства. Заложенные в сочинении идеи подпитывали оппозиционные настроения украинских интеллектуалов дореволюционного и советского периодов, а также стали основной для идеологии современной Украины. В поисках оппозиционности среди украинской элиты Плохий упускает имевшие место развилки и разрывы, а также «русский след» в процессе конструирования украинской нации.

*Ключевые слова:* С. Н. Плохий; История Украины; «История Русов»; украинская нация; украинская шляхта; Н. Г. Репнин.

In Western historical sociology, the history of the Russian state is widely used to understand and explain major social shifts and global changes. Regardless of whether the scope of a historian's attention is revolutions, national movements, or economic crises, one of the key questions is always the same: how, in different periods of Russian history, was imperial power first weakened and then destroyed in 1917 and 1991? S. N. Plokhii, one of the most prominent contemporary Ukrainian historians (Professor of Ukrainian History at the Department of History and the Director of the Harvard University Ukrainian Research Institute), offers a solution to this problem in his work *Kozac'kij mif. Istorija ta nacietvorennja v epohu imperij* [*The Cossack Myth. History and Nationbuilding in the Age of Empires*], a Ukrainian translation of an English-language edition from 2012. In this work, Plokhii offers a simple answer: he argues that the 'destructive effect of the ideas of sovereignty and freedom of peoples' crushed the Russian Empire in 1917 and its Soviet 'reincarnation' in 1991. However, to illustrate this simple theory, the author offers a non-trivial solution, twisting his narrative into a detective story that makes the work a real page-turner. The monograph describes in detail how Ukrainian intellectuals (at least since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) stimulated political changes in the Russian Empire and the USSR. An important source that nourished this process was an anonymous essay entitled *Istoriia rusov* (*The History of the Rus*) (approx. 1810s). Indeed, this text seems to be one of the most significant in constructing a Ukrainian national mythology that remains relevant even today. Prior to Plokhii, nobody had scrutinised *The History of the Rus* in the broad context of major political changes and in terms of the Ukrainian national movement. This review tries to understand how the author substantiates his historical and sociological schemes.



It should be noted *a priori* that Plokhii can be ranked among those researchers who treat images of national memory rather critically, sometimes underlining their destructive consequences (as, for example, in the case with S. Bandera) [Плохий]: this adds to the credibility of the work.

Plokhii's work consists of five parts, an introduction, and a conclusion. The first part, entitled 'The Riddle', analyses the influence of *The History of the Rus* on the historical beliefs of Russians and Ukrainians: he also briefly describes the circumstances of the manuscript's composition (pp. 31–88). The second part, 'Along the Cold Trail', is a historiographical review of the research on *The History of the Rus*

which tackles most versions of its origins (pp. 89–154). The third part, 'The Parts of the Rebus', dismantles unlikely explanations of the manuscript's origins (i.e. all of those existing) and concentrates on reconstructing the time, place, and motives of the manuscript's author(s) (pp. 155–232). In the fourth part, 'Unusual Suspects', Plokhii tries to establish a social and intellectual portrait of the putative authors of *The History of the Rus* (pp. 233–268). The book finishes with the fifth part, 'The Family Circle', where the reader is offered the author's version of the origins of *The History of the Rus* and given detailed answers to the questions posed in earlier parts (p. 317–384). The first chapters of the monograph will be of the most interest for us because this is where Plokhii explains in detail the critical influence of *The History of the Rus* on the process of the disintegration of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

In his introduction, the author formulates the goals and objectives of his research as well as his methodological principles (pp. 15–30). However, right before this, Plokhii attempts to form clearly negative perceptions about the natures of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in the eyes of the unsuspecting reader; he portrays them as states which brought freedom to the peoples of Europe in 1814 and 1945 while at the same time experiencing a drastic deficit of freedom themselves. A special role was played by the fact that the grain 'of the idea of the sovereignty and the freedom of peoples' sprouted in the Russian Empire among the Cossacks of Ukraine (Little Russia), who 'have excelled more than anyone in weakening the empire' (p. 16). The anti-Russian discontent of the Cossacks was nurturing soil for

the emergence of the anonymous manuscript *The History of the Rus*. According to Plokhii, this manuscript 'tells a story how the history of the Cossacks – as a social stratum and an autonomous state – became a nation-building myth that helped to crack Russian imperial identity and became a founding stone of the modern Ukrainian nation' (p. 19). In the author's view, the contents of *The History of the Rus* are a myth created during the 'epoch of fakes,' much like Ossian's poems in England, the manuscript of Dvůr Králové in the Czech lands, and *The Song of Igor's Campaign*<sup>2</sup> in Russia.

According to Plokhii, those involved in the creation of the *History of the Rus*, or at least those who read it, were 'high-ranking officials, who built a career and amassed wealth by strengthening and expanding the empire' and who 'not only glorified the Cossack past, but also advocated a distinct Russian nation' (p. 23). Thus, behind the rather monolithic concept of 'dissatisfied Cossacks' emerges the image of a single actor, namely the Cossack elite that had gained its noble titles within the empire. It was exactly this part of Little Russian society (like the Scottish and Czech national elites) that experienced a need for a national epic in the aftermath of national disasters. To solve this problem, the author(s) of the manuscript chose to write in the genre of 'national mystification' (p. 26). In his concept of the development of Ukrainian identity, Plokhii borrows basic concepts from M. Hroch's model of the late 1960s, according to which the national elite always serves as the founder of a notion of national identity [Hroch, pp. 121–127]. However, is such an approach useful in explaining the nation-building process in Little Russia given that such a national epic required a disaster or defeat? What disasters forced these loyal imperial officials to shake the foundations of the empire during the tranquil reign of Alexander I? Was it some common historical memory about a distant historical trauma that presumably motivated the representatives of the Ukrainian noble elites to create *The History of the Rus*? The answer to these questions can be found in the following sections of the book.

The first chapter starts with a section entitled 'The Call of Freedom,' which begins with an emotional description of the Decembrists' execution. According to the author, *The History of the Rus* played an essential role in the 1825 uprising, when a few 'idealistic officers' tried to change the political system of the Russian Empire ('overthrow the autocracy, destroy serfdom, and convene a constitutional assembly') (p. 32). To establish the connection, Plokhii refers to the famous Russian poet K. F. Ryleyev, who served as the ideological mastermind of the Decembrist movement during the last year and a half of his life [Готовцева, Киянская, с. 212–213]. Ryleyev, while igniting the hearts of the undecided with the fire of his speeches, dramatically radicalised his own views by drawing upon images from Ukrainian history. In Plokhii's opinion, *The History of the Rus* played a fateful role. Ryleyev may have become acquainted with the text in 1824: in a letter from A. F. Brigen (21 October

<sup>2</sup> Granted, the inclusion of *The Song of Igor's Campaign* raises doubts because the authenticity of this manuscript had recently been proven by Zaliznyak of the Russian Academy of Sciences [Зализняк].

1825), it is called the 'Konissky History' (p. 45). The ideas of freedom contained in the text inspired Ryleyev to write the long poems 'Nalivaiko' and 'Voynarovsky'. In the latter, the Ukrainian hetman I. S. Mazepa is a mouth-piece for Ryleyev's own views on tyranny and freedom (p. 39). Such a narration is designed to demonstrate the cumulative effect of *The History of the Rus* on Russian political history. However, once we remove the drama from the narrative, we are left with a number of serious reservations.

Indeed, 'Voynarovsky' is certainly distinct from some of the other works of Ryleyev such as 'Bohdan Khmelnytsky' (1821) or 'Ivan Susanin' (1822), where absolute loyalty is replaced by the theme of the resistance of Ukrainian patriots to the Russian throne. Researchers into Ryleyev's biography note that before the creation of 'Voynarovsky', the poet had drafted a tragedy entitled 'Mazepa', an outline of which was ready as early as 1822. In the early drafts, the author describes Mazepa as a 'power-greedy and cunning person', 'the greatest hypocrite, who hides his evil intentions under the false pretence of wishing to benefit his homeland' [Готовцева, Киянская, с. 224]. In the prose preface to the poem 'Peter the Great in Ostrogozhsk', Ryleyev also attributed negative traits to Mazepa: 'at that time [1696] Mazepa was still not guilty... but this evasive, sly Hetman succeeded in creeping under the mercy of [Tsar] Peter' [Рылеев, p. 135]. In the complete collection of Ryleyev's works, there is a short sketch (1824) where we find the hetman described as a traitor who deemed nothing sacred 'except for the purpose to which he aspired', for the sake of which he could use 'guile in the highest degree, even the most cunning' [Готовцева, Киянская, p. 225]. Evidently the image of Mazepa had notable negative connotations in Ryleyev's work before the creation of 'Voynarovsky'. So, did *The History of the Rus*, where Mazepa is shown rather favourably, indeed play a decisive role?

We would suggest that the situation should be seen differently. Under the patronage of Prince A. N. Golitsyn, the Russian Minister of Education (1816–1824), Ryleyev 'struggled' quite legally with despotism on the pages of the magazine *Polyarnaya zvezda*. Perhaps, in the last year and a half of his life, Ryleyev experienced the problem of 'self-betrayal' in his struggle against the autocracy. This inner conflict was exacerbated by the fact that Ryleyev served as an ideologist in the Decembrist movement, since he was the one who had to persuade the undecided and to show the price that had to be paid for true freedom [Там же, с. 192; 209–210]. However, it is evident in 'Voynarovsky' that the ideal hero, the patriot, is Voynarovsky himself, not Mazepa. It is Voynarovsky who reads 'Brutus from childhood'. His hopes were crushed by the old hetman, whose intentions regarding Ukraine ('whether to save it from woes or erect a throne') remain a mystery to Voynarovsky. This is particularly evident in the scene where the prisoners report to him that «...Мазепу, как Иуду, // Клянут украинцы повсюду» ('...Mazepa, as Judas, // is being cursed by Ukrainians everywhere'). Voynarovsky contemplates: «Ко нраву хитрого вождя // Успел я в десять лет привыкнуть; // Но никогда не в силах я // Был замыслов его проникнуть» ('To the character of the cunning leader // I had time to get used



over a decade; // But never could I // Penetrate his plans'). Voynarovsky gets ready to kill Mazepa in case he learned that the latter was an 'enemy of freedom': overwhelmed and anguished by uncertainty, Voynarovsky 'as a child, began to cry' [Рылеев, с. 184]. Voynarovsky fails to dispel his doubts, and we are left to wonder what exactly the role of the contradictory Hetman-traitor was in the poem.

The use of this character could be a consequence of Ryleyev's desire to hide important ideas about the struggle against despotism behind a patriotic theme. Ryleyev admitted this to Pushkin [Готовцева, Киянская, с. 225]; however, was the Decembrist poet indeed inspired by *The History of the Rus*? This idea seems ill founded. The image of Mazepa as a traitor had entered Russian culture long beforehand; it is no coincidence Ryleyev could freely publish his poem and get a favourable review from F. V. Bulgarin [Там же, с. 233].

On the other hand, by placing his own inner conflict (his 'personal betrayal') into a historical context, Ryleyev could hide his depiction of one powerful figure, Tsar Alexander I, behind the characters of *both* Mazepa and Peter I. Voynarovsky fulsomely 'honours Peter': he says that «и Петр, и я – мы оба правы; // Как он, и я живу для славы, // Для пользы родины моей» ('Peter and I – we both are right; // As him, I also live for the glory, // For the benefit of my country'). This can be read as praise for Alexander. However, in contrast to Peter, Hetman Mazepa stands for Alexander's unfulfilled plans and reforms (for example, the introduction of a constitution) and for the conservative turn in domestic policy. Thoughts of a possible assassination circulated at the time in the 'Northern Society' (for example, A. I. Yakubovich was openly committed to the assassination of the tsar). As for the notion that Ryleyev's idea of freedom originated in the image of Mazepa in *The History of the Rus*, one might ask the question: how is this hero more prominent and important than, say, General Riego y Nuñez, the hero of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War (1820–1823), whose acts of bravery were an example to other Decembrists and to whom Ryleyev himself devoted a poem ('The Citizen', 1824) [Волк, с. 269, 275]? Therefore, the concept of Mazepa as 'the Trailblazer' of the Decembrists rings hollow, and Plokhii's tone of intrigue only serves to make the argument read like good fiction. However, the analysis above does not eliminate the problem of 'Ukrainian separatism' and how thoroughly and impartially Plokhii reconstructs discontent among the Ukrainian Cossack noble elite. Plokhii's strong value judgments about the policies of Alexander I and the activities of Ukrainian intellectuals at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially those from the inner circle of N. G. Repnin, Governor General of Little Russia (1816–1834), deserve special attention.

In Plokhii's opinion, Alexander I's polonophiliac policy, which climaxed with the creation of the autonomous Kingdom of Poland (1815) that spawned 'bitter envy in the hearts of the Ukrainian *szlachta*' (p. 179), was a painful blow to the ego of the Ukrainian nobility, which was supposedly vigilant about the past autonomy of hetman-ruled Ukraine. Another mani-

festation of hostility towards the local elite was the deliberate reassessment of the nobility diplomas possessed by the Little Russian noblemen, which belittled their privileged position (pp. 180–189).

Continued dissatisfaction was reflected in the anti-Polish sentiment in *The History of the Rus*. Most importantly, it also allowed for a 'national discourse' to begin because the representatives of the Ukrainian nobility allegedly used 'nationalist terminology for the defence of their rights and privileges' (p. 190). These motives prompted the author(s) of the manuscript to distance the 'Great Russians' from the historical heritage of 'Old Russia', which was assigned to and kept by 'Cossack heroes'. This became a strategy of 'supercompensation' (Plokhii) for the policies of the Russian government among the heirs of the Cossack elite (pp. 190–191). The cause of the Ukrainian nation, initiated by the nobles of the Ukrainian *szlachta*, was then pursued by members of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood (1845–1847), such as T. G. Shevchenko, N. I. Kostomarov, and P. A. Kulish.

For these individuals, *The History of the Rus* became a kind of 'Bible' in the framework of which they constructed a national story, separate from the history of the Russian state. In the works of the serf-born Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), this division manifested itself clearly in the comedy 'Dream' (1844) (pp. 65–69). In this work, one finds many critical sentences aimed at prominent figures in Russian history, like Peter I ('who crucified our Ukraine') and Catherine II (who 'finished off the widowed orphan'). Deputy Hetman P. L. Polubotko (1722–1723), who condemned Peter (he is 'erecting the capital upon their [Cossacks] beaten corpses!') [Shevchenko], also has a voice in the comedy. Further on, the same illegal organisation gave birth to an ideologically important work, *The Book of Life of the Ukrainian People* (authored by N. I. Kostomarov), in which the basic ideas of *The History of the Rus* were raised to the conceptual level. The Ukrainians and the Russians (the 'moskals') were both parts of the Slavic people, but they had divided because of the despotic character of tsarist power (the Moscow tsar was 'an idol and a despot') that had its origins in the Tatar yoke. Ukraine's desire to have 'neither a tsar nor a [Polish] pan' led to the emergence of the Cossacks, where everyone who joined was deemed a brother and where the elders were chosen by the Rada and had to keep their word. This was the freedom that Ukraine fought for, both against Poland and the 'Moskovschina'. Having spent all its strength, the western part of the country was subjugated to the last Tsar of Muscovy (Peter), who drowned 'hundreds of thousands in the channels and built himself a capital on their bones': finally, the 'German' Catherine II (a loose and godless woman) 'finished off Cossackdom' [Кирило-Мефодіївське товариство, с. 164–167]. Hence, the members of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood, inspired by *The History of the Rus*, formed the final version of the national canon, where the 'Great Russians' were opposed to the 'Little Russians' ('the true Rus') and the tsarist government was depicted as being obsessed with destroying the freedom of the Ukrainian people and their statehood. This canon became the basis for the ideology of the Ukrainian national movement during the Soviet period

and in modern Ukraine (pp. 135–176). These, according to Plokhii, were the consequences of autocratic rule in the Russian Empire.

In order for this sociological scheme to make sense, the author unfortunately makes use of simplifications and even omits key evidence and arguments. Let us discuss these in chronological order.

First of all, the reassessment of the nobility diplomas possessed by the Cossack elite was not a deliberate action against the local gentry. The problem of the authenticity of nobility diplomas was not anything new in Russian history. During the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Herald's Office (*Geroldmeisterskaja Kontora*), the institution that confirmed and issued nobility diplomas, was repeatedly faced with fake documentary evidence and fictional stories [Хоруженко, с. 152].

In Little Russia, the meetings of the deputies of the local nobility between the 1780s and 1790s faced the same problems [Миллер, с. 47]. The number of questionable practices used to obtain noble status in Ukraine by people from the tax-paying classes (merchants, Cossacks and other 'raznochintsy') caused a negative reaction from the Ukrainian Cossack elite. This reaction is reflected in the anonymous text *Remarks on Little Russia*, which talks about the emergence of an incredible number of nobles (about 100,000) and the need to verify their origins [Замечания, с. 19–24]. The final settlement of disputes involved the Herald's Office, which in some cases was on the side of those who had not received ennoblement and thus was opposed to the will of the local noble assembly [Миллер, с. 49–50]. Therefore, the process of incorporating the Ukrainian Cossack elite into the empire demonstrated clear commitment to the closure of class borders and the development of practices directed against the 'unworthy' in their circles.

The verification process for dubious cases severely overloaded the Herald's Office, especially after the Senate Decree of 20 March 1797 declared that only this institution (and not the noble assembly) could confirm noble status [Там же, с. 83]. Tsar Alexander I took this legacy further. During his reign, the overwhelming majority of problems dealt with by the Herald's Office related to finding a way to legally ennoble the Little Russian nobility by correlating Little Russian ranks with official titles in the Table of Ranks [Там же, с. 91–94].

However, if we look at the opinions of the Little Russian nobility and discount their somewhat dubious assertions of striving for the 'common good' of their Little Russian people/nation/compatriots, it is difficult to detect any rhetoric for common national rights. The Chernigov nobleman T. Kalinowski wrote that the title 'Cossack' was a 'knight's rank and [of the] *szlachta* [noble] class': participating in the elections for the position of elder gave the Cossack the right to be a part of the 'gentry estate' (p. 183). The Poltava nobleman V. G. Poletika reasoned that the 'Little Russian nobility, which voluntarily joined the Russians as the only blood brothers of the same faith and served along with them' (p. 186) could not stand the humiliation from the Herald's Office.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See full citation in: [Миллер, с. 97].



Another prominent Little Russian nobleman V. Charnysh lamented that 'refusing the Little Russians ranks nobility status destroys them and their merits, [and] diminishes their personal dignity and that of their offspring': only after this litany does he mention that the practice 'upsets the rights and privileges of this nation' (p. 186). The very rights of this 'nation' are confined to the rights and privileges of the *szlachta*, such as the Lithuanian statute. For most of the second half of the 1800s, the representatives of the Little Russian nobility sought any kind of historical evidence (the tsar charters, nobility charters, government rulings) that would demonstrate the equivalence of 'Little Russian' and 'Great Russian' ranks and thus confirm their noble status [Миллер, с. 100–123]. In their appeals, the members of the local nobility (e.g., the Chernigov nobility) even made direct claims that the Cossack ranks had always been considered *szlachta* [Там же, с. 116]. These claims, however, were later changed into more delicate juridical arguments because they were damaging nobility 'pureness'. References to the Cossack past, or, more precisely, to the 'fundamental basis' of the rights of a Cossack elder, gained a strictly instrumental character because they served as a transition to *szlachta* virtue. It was no coincidence that the Little Russian elite supported the idea that the hetmans had to be restrained by the Russian government because the 'Hetman's rule was the most hellish of all' (A. I. Chepa) [Журба, с. 203]. This anti-Hetman and anti-Cossack rhetoric was a continuation of the ideas that emerged among the Ukrainian Cossack elite in the first half of the 1760s (in the writings of G. A. Poletika, for example).

Thus, among the heirs of the Cossack elite, the perceived circle of 'compatriots' was limited to a specific set of elitist characteristics which were looked upon with suspicion by one of the highest institutions of the empire. It is no accident that in 1809, right after the recognition of the Little Russian Cossack ranks as noble ones, the demands placed before the tsarist government instantly waned (p. 188). Plokhii, however, interprets this as a mere temporary 'truce' that 'the imperial government' broke in 1834, once again assaulting the 'traditional rights' of the Ukrainian gentry elites and their 'Cossack heritage' (p. 189). As a result, the Ukrainian *szlachta* intellectually separated themselves from an 'all-Russian' identity. It is truly incredible that Plokhii comes to such conclusions despite the evidence in the sources.

For example, A. I. Chepa, in a letter discussing the works of G. A. Poletika, pointed out that before 1762 there were 'limitations of rights for the Russian nobility': because of this 'contradictions, quarrels, and bloody conflicts' arose. On the other hand, after the publication of Peter III's decree 'On freedom of the nobility' (1762) and Catherine II's 'The highest charter on the nobility' (1785), 'Russian noblemen were made equal in privileges with the Little Russian *szlachta*, then the Little Russians began to boldly enter the Russian service, they got rid of the Tatar and Polish clothing, they began to speak, sing, and dance in Russian...' [Из истории южно-русского общества, с. 54]. Thus, it is clear that one of the most prominent Ukrainian figures of that time advocated a united 'all-Russian' (noble) identity. It is thus difficult to discern intellectual separation from the 'all-Russian' nation;

instead, this seems to point to competition within one nation. To a certain extent, this suggests that the historical and political traditions of the late 17<sup>th</sup>-century Ukrainian Cossack elite continued: it manifested itself in the further development of the thesis that all parts of Russia belonged under the sceptre of the Russian tsar [Кочерапов, с. 19–36]. It is not surprising that *The History of the Rus* features a notion of 'Russian Tsardom'.

Another one of Plokhii's simplifications is the way he represents the opposition of the Ukrainian nobility to the polonophiliac policy of Alexander I. When trying to identify the provenance of *The History of the Rus* and its author(s), Plokhii provides descriptions of Little Russian noble families from the Starodub (Lashkevich, Skorupa, Miklashevsky, and Gudovich) and Chernigov regions (Shiryay) who opposed the Russian government. To reconstruct their views, Plokhii resorts to the 1812 memoirs of the captured French doctor Dominique Pierre de la Flise. According to the memoirs, in Zavodovsky's palace only the image of Alexander I was lacking among the portraits of Paul I, Alexander Suvorov, and Catherine II. It is the absence of this one portrait that prompts Plokhii to articulate the dreams of the Ukrainian nobility 'about the resumption of Cossack autonomy' (p. 263). Among the sketches made by the doctor, he notes that some of the local nobility were favourable to the ideas of the French Revolution (especially the Skorupas) (pp. 286–287). As another proof of anti-government sentiment, the author uses the 1824 memoirs of A. I. Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, Alexander I's senior adjutant. However, excerpts from the memoir contain the affirmation that 'at every opportunity, Little Russians condemned the reign of Alexander [I] and praised the reign of Catherine [II]': this would be the same Catherine who destroyed their 'ancient privileges' (p. 267). The prominent imperial figure D. P. Troshchinsky (1749–1829), who 'was revered as an oracle in Little Russia' (p. 267), and whose house was a 'centrepiece for liberals', promoted this opinion [Из воспоминаний Михайловского-Данилевского, p. 214]. What a sensational confession! Equally, Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky noted that he had not found 'a single person among those I've managed to speak to who would be favourable to Russia' and that 'everyone possessed a distinct spirit of opposition' (p. 267). Plokhii, while focusing on this short emotional fragment, omits Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky's critical statements about local landowners, their poor education, and the inferior farming methods that had ruined the economy of Little Russia [Там же, с. 213–214]. With this extremely circumstantial evidence, Plokhii is trying to represent the Ukrainian nobility's opposition as a homogeneous and powerful phenomenon of social life in Little Russia. Plokhii's most unfortunate omission is that he misses the *Russian trace* in the process of Ukrainian nation-building in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout almost the entire monograph, the figure of Governor General N. G. Repnin is repeatedly brought up. This nobleman, who was married to the granddaughter of the last Hetman K. G. Razumovsky, was related to the poet Ryleyev: according to some accounts, the author of *The History of the Rus* was most probably a member of his close circle. Many

Ukrainian nobles who at one time or another are considered by Plokhii as possible authors of the *History* or as 'opposition' figures were friends with Repnin; however, Repnin appears to have been an intellectual opponent of the probable author of *The History of the Rus*, S. M. Shiryai [c. 34, 100, 360–384]. Despite this, Plokhii does not detect anything circumspect in this evidence and thus belittles the importance of N. G. Repnin in the political and intellectual life of Little Russia. Some questions remain: why did K. F. Ryleyev obsequiously seek Repnin's favour and even possibly devote his famous epic poem 'Bogdan Khmel'nitsky' to him? Why would this nobleman gather various intellectuals of Little Russia, mentioned in Plokhii's book as patriots (V. V. Kapnist, I. P. Kotlyarevsky), around himself and sponsor their activities? According to a recent study by O. I. Kiyanskaya (2008), during Repnin's years in office, the discourse of 'lost freedom' among Ukrainian intellectuals began to be translated into real and meaningful actions. This was accelerated by the desire of Prince Repnin to present himself not merely as an independent politician, but also as the leader of the local community. To this end, he contributed to cultural and historical initiatives (like those of D. N. Bantysh-Kamensky, for example): he favoured the poet Kotlyarevsky (the founder of modern Ukrainian literature), supported him materially, and promoted his works. He did the same for V. V. Kapnist. In collaboration with Bantysh-Kamensky, Repnin searched for all the necessary documents to create a history of Little Russia. Repnin commissioned A. I. Chepa and M. Markov, an amateur historian, director of the Chernigov gymnasium, and the superior of Ya. F. Radkevich, to write this work. It was during Repnin's governorship that rumours about the prince's ambitions began to circulate. Therefore, behind his support for the rights of the local nobility, Repnin could have been hiding plans to create an independent state (he had experience as a viceroy in Saxony in 1814). It is no coincidence that the prince continued to be accused of separatism and Ukrainophilia during the reign of Nicholas I.

These rumours were probably encouraged by the fact that M. I. Novikov, the head of Repnin's secretariat, opened a Masonic lodge called 'Love of Truth' in Poltava (1818–1823). Novikov himself had a special status in the Decembrist society 'the Union of Prosperity', especially in terms of recruiting new members. Among the members of the lodge were people from Repnin's close circle and the cream of the local nobility: I. Kotlyarevsky and S. Kochubey were active members. This society was known to the Decembrists (including P. I. Pestel, the head of the Southern Society). According to one account, the purpose of this secret society might have been the separation of Little Russia from the empire [Киянская, p. 251–295]. And who knows what would have happened if 'the revolt of the reformers' was a success! As can be seen from the above facts, if one may talk about the opposition movement in Little Russia, it had a 'state' character (the *Russian trace*) and was little more than a tool for realising the political ambitions of someone other than Ukrainian (or Little Russian) patriots. Thus, Plokhii's work is simultaneously a valuable and a controversial study that may indeed mis-

lead the inexperienced reader. The whole book is based on a negative image of the notion of 'empire' embodied in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. This monolithic meta-image (the image of the enemy), while possessing a logic of its own, permanently interfered with the 'Ukrainian national revival'. In an attempt to reconstruct the possible influence of the idea of freedom contained in *The History of the Rus* upon Ukrainian and Russian history, the author has succumbed to romantic temptations. The author has constructed the history of the formation of the Ukrainian nation through the lens of a supposedly permanent opposition of Ukrainian elites to their Russian rulers, omitting important discontinuities in this process. The oppositional character of the Little Russian elite is based on shaky hunches and controversial reconstructions. However, if one considers the contents of the 'Cossack myth', one can see that the Ukrainian opposition of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries could earnestly defend a united 'all-Russian' (noble) identity. The Ukrainian (Little Russian) nobility did not put tales from Cossack antiquity at the forefront of their politics: indeed, it sought to disown them. Manifestations of local patriotism were often provoked by the pro-Polish policy of Alexander I, not those of his predecessors. Shiryays was probably the only partial exception (if one trusts the diary of M. P. Pogodin and the memoirs of A. I. Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky). The notion that *The History of the Rus* had an 'explosive impact' on the ideas of prominent Decembrists is also the product of psychological second-guessing in the monograph. Another question is how the 'state' version (the *Russian trace*) of Ukrainian separatism formed under the influence of Repnin, then the Governor General of Little Russia. Perhaps it was this very 'permission from above' that gave people the opportunity to express some form of dissatisfaction, even if they had completely different political goals. These goals had nothing to do with the ones that the representatives of the Ukrainian *raznochintsy* intellectuals, inspired by the *History of the Rus*, chose for themselves. The members of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood conceptually fixated on those very 'historical traumas' that later formed the basic concepts of Ukrainian national history. The main value of the reviewed monograph lies in the fact that Plokhii, by using extremely extensive materials, has demonstrated how text and images from an anonymous manuscript have been mobilised by activists in the Ukrainian national movement from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries to design and preserve a national myth which, unfortunately, contributes little to Russian-Ukrainian scientific dialogue.

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